A young doctor named Kiselev, who was totally
661 unacquainted with the agricultural situation in Belorussian and
645 its people, was made President of the Sovnarkom.* Before the war, Kiselev was recalled to Moscow and appointed third deputy of the People's Commissariat of Public Health of the R. S. F. S. R.

661 After the Ezhovshchina all the higher echelons, including the Supreme Soviet, the Sovnarkom, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Academy of Sciences, and others took measures to efface from the national memory those figures who had become victims of the terror. Whenever it was necessary to apply some legislative act the correctness of which was not open to question, the signatures of anyone already dead or in a concentration camp were carefully concealed. Every allusion to the decoration of individual figures or institutions, such as the theaters, was destroyed /38/ as having been the work of enemies of the people. Under Ponomarenko the long established Belorussian tradition of appointing a Belorussian as second secretary of the Party was stopped. On Ponomarenko's request Moscow sent its own men out to Belorussia as commissars, directors of Central Committee subdivisions, and secretaries. Not following the example of former Party secretaries, Ponomarenko did not try to make himself popular by attending political meetings or other kinds of gatherings. Organizational work was handled by the other Party secretaries and directors of subdivisions. Ponomarenko loved displaying himself as a patron of the arts. He devoted a lot of attention to organizing various types of 'dekada', even in Moscow. He could be seen at theater premieres and at the Belorussian opera. He was also a sports enthusiast and visited the football matches at the stadiums.

Western Belorussia and Wilno in Soviet Hands

661 In 1939 the Red Army forcibly united Soviet Belorussia with
177 its western portion.

A territory including a hundred new rayons was added. It had completely different attitudes toward the forms of state life, and, as might have been expected, a tremendous propaganda campaign on the ideal value of the form and content of Soviet power was initiated in the new rayons with all institutions being reorganized on the Soviet model. Soviet Belorussia alone, however, could not quite cope with this new territory, and workers were sent out from the central oblast's of the R. S. F. S. R.. Their selection was not invariably successful --

* [After the 1936-1937 political purge - Analyst]

177 661 everything grew more and more disorganized just when the situation demanded the strictest order. I must admit that the Belorussian grass-roots population in general, and also the working intelligentsia, did not fear the arrival of the Soviets: Many, especially the poorest of the peasantry, expected free land--while the workers looked forward to the elimination of unemployment. The intelligentsia placed its hopes upon being allowed to acquire learning in its native language without being forced to become Polish or Catholic and upon seeing the Belorussian youth freely admitted into high schools and universities. In truth there was much in the first days after the arrival of the Soviet power that was hard for the Belorussians to understand. For instance, the mass purchase by the Soviets of all food products, shoes, manufactured articles and all the other things which the stores had in abundance--while at the same time the population heard every day, at meetings and on the radio, about the happy and plentiful life in the Soviet Union. Food for thought was also provided by the impoverished appearence of the Soviet employees, even the higher ones, who were coming to western Belorussia to work or on missions. Nor was it easy to understand why the former boundary, together with special passes, /69/ was preserved, and why the local population could not get permission to visit relatives on the other side. The newly created Soviet institutions worked far from smoothly. The population was also badly surprised when an unexpected decree annulled all former Polish money with hardly any exchange for Soviet money and when hard-earned savings as well as other kinds of money was confiscated in banks and savings institutions. This measure put all pensionaries and the whole working population in a very difficult position. There were some instances of landlords and other wealthy persons being murdered as a result of the incitement by propagandists. Those guilty of such killings were never brought to justice for the simple reason that Ponomarenko himself, in a constructive speech to those responsible workers who were just arriving, let it be understood that it was not worth their trouble to attach any importance to such blood vengeance since they testified to the "national anger" of the masses.

Simultaneously there were unceasing arrests throughout all of western Belorussia. The prisons were overflowing with Polish officials and government employees, with peasants who in some function or another had been attached to Polish institutions, with volost' foremen /starshina/, village elders, and policemen. Old Russian emigrants

were also arrested, as well as Belorussian soldiers from the Polish Army who had escaped German imprisonment, any of the masses of those who were caught attempting to get into the central zone of Poland which was still under German occupation, members of the local clergy and any well-to-do elements. All who were under severe suspicion were dispatched to the N. K. V. D. in Minsk, and the rest--to concentration camps in Siberia. The conditions of imprisonment were repellent, and the methods employed during examinations were worse even than those of the despised Polished Defensiva. Belorussians openly admitted to the examiners that the Poles had been Polonizing them for twenty years without success, but that with the arrival of the Soviets, Polonization had been accomplished within a few months. This was the general tenor. In addition to the general arrests there were also individual ones, meaning that various segments of the population were liquidated. The first victims were the so-called Polish settlers, that is, the Polish colonizers who were the bulwark of the Polish state in western Belorussia. They were former members of the Polish army who had been allotted private homesteads with twenty to fifty hectares of land on preferential terms as well as being granted preferential /agricultural/ credits. The Orthodox Belorussian population was not even granted the right to buy land from these landlords. However, together with their families they were now shipped off to the east. One winter night all the employees of the forest service were sent off in the same direction /70/ starting with the forest wardens, who had been partly appointed by the Soviets themselves, and extending even to professors of forestry. It was supposed that there were a lot of Polish Army weapons hidden in the woods and that the forest service knew about them; this was the reason for their deportation to Siberia. The families of Polish Army soldiers were likewise arrested and deported.

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A few words about the transfer of the city of Wilno to the still semi-independent Lithuania. This transfer was accomplished at the end of 1939. Wilno is a rich trading city which was forcibly seized by the Polish general, Zhelikhovskii, and then included within the Polish state. When the Red Army occupied Wilno, the general opinion was that it would be included in Soviet Belorussia. However, the plan for seizing the Baltic area had already matured, and negotiations concerning an agreement to quarter Red Army soldiers on Baltic territory were imminent. In order that the Lithuanians should have a good opinion concerning the Soviet intentions toward them it was

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000 decided to give Wilno to Lithuania, knowing that in this way it would become Soviet.

However, before deserting Wilno even temporarily, the military high command of the Red Army picked a special purchasing commission which bought up manufactured articles with captured Polish money. They also bought hides and leather goods, various types of machinery, etc. All the purchases were taken out of Wilno and exported into the center of the Soviet Union. The bigger merchants concealed most of their wares, but their stores were discovered with the aid of their servants (shop assistants). After the termination of the officially-appointed period for the transfer of Wilno to Lithuania the city remained in the hands of the N.K.V.D. for two more days. The latter liquidated all the "unneeded" elements in the city and the prisons.

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The Communist guidance of the life of the Belorussian people during P. Ponomarenko's term in office, can be characterized as a period of comparative quiet. No one particularly admired his methods or his personality, but there were no disturbing occurrences similar to those which marked the secretaryships of Gikalo and Volkov. The unification of western Belorussia distracted people's attention to a great extent from the various unnecessary experiments and tensions on the old territory of Soviet Belorussia. Everyone who had the chance, particularly the working intelligentsia, writers, poets, theatrical employees, singers, and musicians, used all their pull to get assigned to the newly-attached territory. Most of them wanted to get acquainted with the new capitalist world and see there the horrible suffering and generally pitiable existence of the peasantry and workers. Instead of it they saw, if not an absolutely high standard of living, at least /71/ the possibility of acquiring both food products and other articles for everyday use. These circumstances dispersed the legend of the oppressiveness of capitalism. In accordance with his means everyone tried to get clothes and shoes for himself, and in particular to buy something for his wife and children. Every conceivable employee in Moscow, from the All-Union Commissariats and various trusts right up to deputy commissars tried to get into Western Belorussia. The directors of Belorussian agricultural trusts acquired light cars with small cylinder displacement and often brought them back even to the All-Union Commissars, for a price, of course, but a comparatively low one. This type of light car appeared not

only in Minsk but even in Moscow, and they also got to Moscow by way of western Ukraine. They were considered very useful since they did not consume a lot of scarce gasoline.

As a matter of fact Soviet people could not understand the national antagonisms existing in former Poland. In Soviet Belorussia marriages between Belorussians and Jews were a common occurrence, but there, in western Belorussia, it was considered almost impossible and in any case an occurrence quite out of the ordinary. Some Soviet people were also surprised by the extreme subservience of the local population, particularly the peasantry, before government representatives and city people in general. This was the result of the training given by the Polish regime. Nonetheless a very short period of Soviet rule was sufficient to disappoint the population[1] - the new government caused all wares to disappear in the stores; there were queues for every possible trifle; Soviet currency was almost valueless; all acts committed by local people in the past, even of the most innocent nature, were ferreted out and brought to light if they had any relation with the Soviet government which had not existed on that territory at the time. A broad net of N.K.V.D. informers was spread out everywhere; all peace and quiet was shattered by arrests and the frequent occurrence of unexpected and senseless searches. Universal fear and suspicion soon became entrenched on the occupied territory. The local population, particularly the prosperous upper level and the intelligentsia, was very scornful in its relations with Soviet people, no matter who they were, although this feeling was hidden.

At this point it would be possible to terminate our description of Soviet reality on the eve of the Second World War. Only a few words more need to be said concerning the activity of the N.K.V.D. in this comparatively quiet period. It did not stop its arrests. People were always being snatched away, some because of the testimonies of prisoners arrested during the Exhovshchina, others for listening to foreign radio broadcasts. There was a purge among the workers and employees who had been brought to Minsk from Wilno together with a dismantled radio factory. /72/ Those in whose dossiers there was the slightest, most absurd, evidence from the agents were given particularly careful checkups as well as those who had already served some sentence in a concentration camp.

1 [in western Belorussia, annexed to Soviet Belorussia in 1939. Cf cat. 116, pp. 76-79 -- Analyst]

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Democratic Republic'. The 'Centre' was reported to receive its intructions from Vilna and to recruit its membership from among 'remnants of Kulaks, White Guards and counter-revolutionary nationalists'.

According to the then First Party Secretary of Byelorussia, Gikalo, the party was forced to fight not only against an outside organization but also against nationalist agents in its own ranks. These nationalist agents, said Gikalo, had penetrated into the party in the early thirties and had apparently succeeded in occupying a large number of positions in the local government machinery. As in the Ukraine, the offensive against the nationalists inside the Communist Party was launched on the express orders of the leadership of the All-Union Communist Party. The All-Union Central Committee intervened in Minsk not only to secure the purity of communist principles in Byelorussia but also to protect in that republic the interests of Russian culture and the Russian language.

Moscow's intervention was precipitated by what became known as the 'Stsepuro Affaire'. A teacher with the name of Stsepuro had written a letter in Russian to a Byelorussian village council. Stsepuro's action led to a nationalistic outcry in which the local communist organizations and Soviet officials sided against the teacher, who in their view, ought to have written in Byelorussian. The matter was taken up by the Moscow newspaper *Pravda* and finally prompted the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party to draw attention to the 'distortion of Soviet nationalities policy' in Byelorussia. The statement of the Central Committee said that any ban against the Russian language and any persecution of persons using Russian were offences 'profitable only to the class enemy'. The Central Committee of the Byelorussian communists drew the necessary conclusions from the rebuke of the Moscow leaders and at a plenary meeting in December, 1933, proclaimed Byelorussian nationalism as the 'main danger'.[32]

Moscow had thus won the first round in the struggle against the local nationalist forces in Byelorussia. The second part of the fight reached its climax in the summer of 1937 when all prominent Byelorussian communists were charged with conducting a nationalist policy. They included Alexander Grigoryevich Chervyakov, President of the Byelorussian Soviet Republic who committed suicide, the Prime Minister, Nikolai Matveyevich Goloded and the First Party Secretary and arch-purger of 1933–34, Gikalo. Both Goloded and Gikalo were executed. The main charge directed against them was that 'they had tried to tear away the Byelorussian people from the socialist culture of the Great Russian people'. The men around Chervyakov, asserted an official publication, 'were determined to oust the Russian language from the schools, to do away with Russian revolutionary plays, with Russian belletristic literature and works of music. They thus made it difficult for

563 but also, as in the case of the Ukraine, because of the transfer of Poles and Hitler's extermination of the Jews.

Another important task resulting from the annexation of Western Byelorussia still remains to be carried out by the Government of the B.S.S.R. A large proportion of the Western Byelorussians have little or no Byelorussian national consciousness, and they speak some sort of [197] local Slav dialect which they themselves do not identify as Byelorussian. This applies in particular to the population of Polesia where Polish statistics counted over 700,000 such 'local Slavs'. 'Greater Byelorussia' is now about to round off the formation of a Byelorussian nation by amalgamating the various brands of Byelorussians, not only formally in a purely administrative sense, but also politically and spiritually.

177.56 563 [795] This process, intended to effect the transformation of the Western Byelorussians into a full 'sovietized' people, has encountered considerable opposition, particularly among the Roman Catholics who had formed 20 per cent of the entire Byelorussian minority of the former North-Eastern Poland. The Roman Catholic Byelorussians had always most violently opposed the thesis of the 'brotherhood' between Byelorussians and Great Russians and their political organization under the Polish régime, the Christian Democratic Union, significantly called itself 'Byeloruthenian' instead of 'Byelorussian'.

186 Byelorussian opposition to the Soviet régime is dictated not only by economic and religious motives but also by national considerations. Although it has united Western and Eastern Byelorussia, the Soviet Government has offended Byelorussian nationalism by leaving the city of Vilna outside the Byelorussian 'State'. The Western Byelorussians looked upon Vilna as their national cultural centre and there may have been indeed a good case for including it in Byelorussia, but it was politically more expedient to make it the capital of Soviet Lithuania.

The difficulties which the Soviet régime had to face in post-war Byelorussia were not confined to the new western territories. The whole of Byelorussia had been occupied by the Germans for two to three years, and it was only natural that Soviet propaganda had to start in many respects right from the beginning when the Red Army re-entered Byelorussian territory. A statement by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party heralding the new propaganda campaign admitted indirectly that German Nazi propaganda had been successful among Byelorussians. The Communist Party organizations of Byelorussia were instructed in this statement to overcome 'the anti-collectivist and anti-state tendencies' with which the German occupants had indoctrinated the Byelorussian people.[35]

Many expressions of Byelorussian nationalism, however, existed quite independently of the moral consequences of German occupation. Judging by official Soviet admissions, Byelorussian nationalism, particularly